



ISSUE 4: MAY, 2019

**Letter from the Editor:**  
*Brothers and Sisters!*

*Can I be honest with you all about my state of mind? I sit here at my laptop making the final touches to this newsletter feeling drained. I understand that you all deal with the evils and violently oppressive conditions of life behind enemy lines so I always sympathise. There are aoppressive forces beating down on the warriors committed to this fight on both sides of the wall. I also feel a weight I struggle to bear that's all my own, that no one understands, but I promise that I'm doing all I can to serve you all with all the capacity I have to offer. My capacity straches to all ends of the nation from the dirty South, across the East coast and into the Pacific Northwest where I reside. I am stretched, so please sympathise with me.*

*This issue of the Right2Vote Report focuses on Unity. Unity in struggle and in peace. Along with sharing our burdens we must share our victories. Here we'll demonstrate the ways in which our Right2Vote efforts have unified in order form a national front to support everyone involved. We will accomplish our goals, voting rights for all and eventual abolition, so long as we remained unified in struggle and in peace. The time will come when this system no longer functions as a slave trade. I look forward to that day because for as long as prisons exist, we will always have aspects of Jim Crow laws governing our society. Establishing voting rights for prisoners is apart of the many methods to breaking down the laws that were constructed to preserve slavery. Dismantling these types of laws are apart of dismantling the entire system, restoring prisoners right2vote is an example of that.*

*Voting is an accountability tool that is denied to prisoners in the United States for one main reason. Prisons are an extension of slavery. Officials do not want to be accountable for the degrading conditions of prisons but that time is coming to an end. This system cannot support itself, it's way overdue for massive transformation and will soon bring itself to an end. My hope is that we will all be here to share in that celebrating moment. Most of us will be on the outside, but all of us will be in anticipation of our communal freedom that depends on our total liberation. For those of whom whose physical liberation depends on that moment you are the kings and queens on whose experiences we will depend for generations. With eternal gratitude I thank you for your strength, enlightenment and inspiration. We are all fighting for you. United in struggle and in peace.*

*In Solidarity,  
Amani Sawari  
@Sawarimi*

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

How Right2Vote Grew from a Prison Demand to National Discussion.....	2
New Suffragists Fight to Gain Ballot for Incarcerated People.....	3
Dozens of Civil Rights Groups Ask Presidential Candidate to Support Letting People Vote in Prison.....	4
Open Letter to Presidential Candidates on Voting Rights.....	5
May Day: The Day of Unifying Our Actions.....	6
Submission Info.....	7

**These are the NATIONAL DEMANDS of the men and women in federal, immigration and state prisons:**

- 1.Immediate improvements to the conditions of prisons and prison policies that recognize the humanity of imprisoned men and women.
- 2.An immediate end to prison slavery. All persons imprisoned in any place of detention under United States jurisdiction must be paid the prevailing wage in their state or territory for their labor.
- 3.Rescission of the Prison Litigation Reform Act, allowing imprisoned humans a proper channel to address grievances and violations of their rights.
- 4.Rescission of the Truth in Sentencing Act and the Sentencing Reform Act so that imprisoned humans have a possibility of rehabilitation and parole. No human shall be sentenced to death by incarceration or serve any sentence without the possibility of parole.
- 5.An immediate end to the racial overcharging, over-sentencing and parole denials of Black and brown humans. Black humans shall no longer be denied parole because the victim of the crime was white, which is a particular problem in Southern states.
- 6.An immediate end to racist gang enhancement laws targeting Black and Brown humans.
- 7.No denial of access to rehabilitation programs for imprisoned humans at their place of detention because of their label as a violent offender.
- 8.State prisons must be funded specifically to offer more rehabilitation services.
- 9.Reinstatement of Pell grant eligibility to prisoners in all US states and territories .
- 10.Recognition of voting rights for all confined citizens serving prison sentences, pretrial detainees and so-called "ex-felons." Their votes must be counted. Representation is demanded. All voices count!

**ACTIVE RIGHT2VOTE LEGISLATION**

**WA: SB 5076 & SB 5207**  
**CA: ACA 6**  
**NM: HB 57**  
**MO: HB 508**  
**LA: HB 265**  
**KY: SB 238**  
**SC: H 4048**  
**NY: S1931 & A4987**  
**MA: SD25 & SD26**  
**NJ: A3456 & S2100**  
**IL: HB 2541 & SB2090**

# RECENT STATE ACTION

INTRODUCED | VOTED | PASSED

## How Right2Vote Grew from a Prison Demand to National Discussion

by Amani Sawari May 3, 2019 | [www.sawarimi.org](http://www.sawarimi.org)

The Right2Vote Campaign was born out of 2018's National Prison Strike where incarcerated citizens led a nationwide demonstration against the abhorrent conditions of United States prisons. The strike was so vast that it spread across 17 states into 3 additional regions outside of the U.S. Prisoners made their demands known worldwide and what seemed to some to be the most ambitious demand of them all became the battle cry that expanded into the New Suffrage movement of 2019.

Over this past year several states introduced legislation to restore the voting rights of citizens impacted by incarceration, from grassroots to large organizations. In January California, Massachusetts, Missouri, Washington, New Mexico and New York all filed bills towards an end to felony disenfranchisement. By February organizers at Chicago Votes in Illinois and Kentuckians for the Commonwealth in Kentucky filed bills as well. Throughout the beginning of this year organizers in these states, in partnership with others from all over the country, worked together to bring their state closer to full enfranchisement.

### Networking to Rapid Growth

It's incredible to see the way that the Right2Vote campaign has taken shape so far this year. Beginning with incarcerated citizens hope of being heard by officials, their demands reached the ears of outside organizers that were more than willing to respond to their call. Jailhouse Lawyers Speak, a group of incarcerated activists, recruited spokespeople to relay their demands to the outside world. In a similar manner Initiate Justice organizers in California responded to incarcerated Californian's call by joining together under the understanding that, "Democracy Needs Everyone". These words that originally left the lips of Juan incarcerated at Chuckawalla Vally State Prison, evolved into the national slogan of this suffrage movement.

In April, by the time of Bernie's presidential campaign announcement in favor of restoring voting rights to prisons, like those in his state of Vermont, the issue rose to the level of national debate. Now 2020 candidates were being asked to respond directly to the question of prisoners voting rights. Those who were not in favor were forced to defend their lack of support of a fully enfranchised democracy. Following some candidates, like Corey Booker's, refusing to take a stance dozens of organizations signed on to a letter to presidential candidates on voting rights saying, "We need a President who will stand up for the right of all Americans to vote. We thus ask each of you to publicly commit to ending felony disenfranchisement and to call for the restoration of voting rights for all citizens, regardless of their criminal history."

With Bernie defending the rights of even the most heinous of criminals, restoring prisoners voting rights has become as simple as helping people understand that the right to vote is inherit to citizenship. The public is beginning to realize that one's citizenship is not lost in the same way that one's humanity is not lost during their incarceration.

### Stalled in Committee

At this point, each of the state's individual voting bills have already been assigned to a committee in their state's legislature except for in California. Initiate Justice, a California based organization, continues to wait for their bill, ACA 6, to be assigned to committee. However, its sister bill, AB 646 that was created in order to adjust the laws that would be affected by ACA 6 has already been assigned to the Elections & Redistricting Committee though it was introduced months after ACA 6. ACA 6 would need to be heard, voted on and passed by the Spring of 2020 in order to be included on the 2020 ballot. Aside from California, all of the other state's bills continue

in committee waiting for representatives to move them forward. Organizers have to work hard in order to get committee members' attention for a voting hearing in order to for their bill to move forward to the next step in the process.

For example, in New Mexico Millions for Prisoners' organizers had their hearing date rescheduled multiple times. Supporters who'd gotten to testify were unable to do so after a their Friday March 1 hearing date was rescheduled to Monday. Thankfully I was able to attend the bill's hearing with the House Judiciary Committee. While sitting in the committee hearing for House Bill 57 I realized how far some of our representatives are from recognizing the humanity of incarcerated citizens, and even the humanity of formerly incarcerated citizens. Currently in New Mexico one's right to vote is not restored until after the completion of probation or parole. Tens of thousands of people are disenfranchised as a result. During the hearing, dozens of people stood up and shared testimony as to why formerly incarcerated and incarcerated residents should have their voting rights restored. To my dismay, after hearing all of those testimonies representative James Townsend stated that, though it was nice to hear the thoughts of all the people he still believed that as a part of serving one sentence they shouldn't be allowed to vote because they need to "prove themselves".

### Disqualified from Democracy

A lot of people still hold this insensitive worldview believing that certain behaviors disqualify citizens to participate in democracy but but in a corrective environment, serving time should actually encourage a person to be more politically engaged. Sadly, the opposite is true in our country because of the fact that felony disenfranchisement is an attack on impoverished communities and communities of color. Felony disenfranchisement is a symptom left behind from the Jim Crow era. A country that's committed to the abolition of slavery should also be committed to repealing any laws that were put in place in order to uphold slave practices and that includes the felony disenfranchisement.

During this first quarter of this year the suffrage movement has stretched farther than it ever has in order to be inclusive of all citizens within our democracy. The fight for incarcerated citizens voting rights isn't new. Last year organizers in both California and New Jersey began the process to restore voting rights to prisoners. California organizers collected thousands of signatures on the Voting Restoration and Democracy Act to restore the voting rights of prisoners. There's an obvious desire from citizens from the East to the West coast to make our democracy more inclusive of everyone involved, especially our most marginalized and unheard members.

Today many of the efforts have reached a legislative road block with many committees, rather than allowing citizens to see where they stand on this essential issue, are allowing these bills to sit in committee until the next legislative session. Legislators do not want to be known as the one who voted against the expansion of voting rights but they also don't want to seem too radical by moving it forward. This has been the case in every single state involved in the campaign: Massachusetts, SD25 & SD26; New Jersey, A3456 & S2100; New Mexico, HB57; Illinois, SB 2090; Virginia, SJ261 & SJ262; Washington, SB 5076 & SB 5207; California, ACA6; New York, S1931 & A4987; Missouri, HB 508 and Kentucky, SB 238. After seeing the way that legislation took its dips and turns, organizers behind the bills are looking into ways to take the legislative process into their own hands. For example, in Massachusetts organizers are preparing to go on a petitioning campaign in order to restore voting rights to their caged community members. Likewise in Michigan and Ohio where representatives had not introduced R2V legislation, citizens are re-searching the steps for restoring prisoners voting rights through citizen initiatives. The issue of voting rights isn't all about politics, it has a lot to do with who we see as worthy of voicing their opinion. Who we allow to vote shines a light on who we view as valuable and human.

The conversation raises the question of, Who belongs in America? Who deserves to have a seat at the table? What makes someone American enough? I want America to be inclusive of its own citizens, even the ones who have engaged in behaviors that we don't approve of. The only way that we can make our country a more equitable place for everyone is if we include everyone. Right now America isn't working well for those impacted by incarceration, but we can help America work better if we allow those individuals to give us a portion of their experience though simply casting their ballot.

## Attica Prisoners Paved the Way

This demand for full enfranchisement is growing into reality in the exact same way that prisoners ignited a new wave of national conversation in 1971's Attica Prison Riot. As a result of prisoners demands then, prisoners today have access to at least a few programs and classes in their facility. Restrictions are inconsistent and biased against those labeled as violent offenders but in 1971 many programs were completely none existent. During Attica, a couple of Prisoners' demands then were, "We Demand the establishment of unionized vocational training programs comparable to that of the Federal Prison System which provides for union instructions, union pay scales, and union membership upon completion of the vocational training course." and "We Demand annual accounting of the inmates Recreational Fund and formulation of an inmate committee to give inmates a voice as to how such funds are used." As a result of these demands the national consciousness recognized a need for reform. Vocation and Training programs were brought into the prison and in states like Michigan a prison benefit fund (PBF) was created. Now corrections departments are required to have funds dedicated to programming and prisoner needs.

Though the quantity and quality of programming isn't ideal, the establishment of such programs would be nonexistent had prisons not demanded it in 1971. Prisoners would be hindered by gang and race barriers had George Jackson not tore

down those walls in 1971. In the same way no one would be talking about prisoners voting rights had prisoners not risked their lives to organize a national demonstration last year. People pay attention when prisoners stand up because the state works so hard to suppress their voices. Voting is a tool used to tally the collective concerns of those who may not have access to officials otherwise. Voting is the perfect tool for prisoners! Especially in this day where violence and abuse re normalized in the facilities were they reside with no effective procedure for filing their grievances or addressing their concerns.

Prisoners in the Attica Uprising concluded their demands with the statement, "The taxpayers who just happen to be our mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, daughters and sons should be made aware of how their tax dollars are being spent to deny their sons, brothers, fathers and uncles of justice, equality and dignity." This statement continues to reign true. As taxpaying citizens on the outside we are responsible to our caged community members for their conditions. There's no reason why we're paying \$30,000/year on average on each prisoner for them to live in deplorable conditions with no access to proper medical care. It's time that we give prisoners the vote so that they can help us correct the injustices that they're faced to live under. Total reformation of the criminal justice system is going to take time and the need to do so is long overdue, but the first step is to make sure that the brothers and sisters whose lives depend on these changes have the right to vote when they come through. —

## LEGISLATION UPDATE

BILL | POLICY | CAMPAIGN

# New Suffragists Fight to Gain Ballot for Incarcerated People

by Candice Bernd May 01, 2019 | [www.truthout.org](http://www.truthout.org)



Suffrage activist Desmond Meade is hugged by a friend inside the Orange County Supervisor of Elections office after registering to vote. People with felony convictions regained their voting rights in Florida on January 8, 2019.

Phelan M. Ebenhack from the Washington Post Getty Images

Republicans in the largest swing state have already begun chipping away at civil rights activists' biggest victory in the movement to restore voting rights to incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people with felony convictions. After Florida voters overwhelmingly passed a ballot measure reversing the state's lifetime voting ban for most people convicted of felonies who have completed their sentences, the GOP-controlled state Senate voted for a bill that would drastically limit the number of people who will be allowed to cast ballots in next year's presidential election.

Senate Republicans voted along party lines last week to pass a bill implementing the constitutional amendment approved by voters with a major caveat: The bill would require all financial obligations ordered by a judge be paid before people can vote.

Civil rights activists have decried the change as a new poll tax that could keep tens of thousands from the ballot box. The move comes as the debate over allowing incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people to vote continues to divide the 2020 Democratic presidential candidates. Sen. Bernie Sanders boldly called for restoring voting rights to all people with felony convictions, including those behind bars, at a presidential town hall last month, a position that is not shared by any other major candidate.

Sen. Cory Booker has become the most recent candidate to take a swipe at Sanders over the proposal. Senator Booker's criminal legal reform bill, The Next Step Act, was introduced in March and would allow people with felony convictions to vote in federal elections.

However, Booker called Sanders's stance in favor of voting rights for all currently incarcerated people "frustrating." Only two states currently allow people who are incarcerated to vote: Maine and Sanders's home state of Vermont. In 22 other states, people are disenfranchised during incarceration and parole and/or probation. In these states, people with felony convictions may also have to pay any outstanding restitution before their voting rights are restored, according to the National Conference on State Legislatures.

About 6.1 million citizens are currently denied the right to vote due to a felony conviction, according to the Sentencing Project; that's 1 in 13 Black adults compared to 1 in every 56 non-Black adults. Debate over the issue has been slowly gaining traction in several states, including conservative states, such as Kentucky and Alabama, as criminal legal reform advocates steadily push back against voting restrictions in state legislatures. Such suffrage activists are emphasizing the long-term civil constraints placed on disenfranchised communities of color in their states, and stressing that stripping incarcerated citizens of their right to vote has no benefit for public safety.

Iowa lawmakers, with the support of Republican Gov. Kim Reynolds, recently tried to change the state's lifetime disenfranchisement law, but the proposal failed to advance out of the state Senate. Legislation to ease voting restrictions has also been proposed in California, Texas, Tennessee, Connecticut, New Jersey and Minnesota.

Still, a measure to let all incarcerated citizens vote didn't make it out of the solidly Democratic Hawaii Legislature this year. Likewise, a bill to restore the voting rights of people with certain felony convictions took baby steps in the Democrat-controlled New Mexico Legislature — but only after a provision to let incarcerated people vote was removed. The amended bill still died in the state Senate, however.

Beyond Booker's Next Step Act, two other federal bills have also been introduced this year that would allow people with felony convictions to vote in federal elections. Additionally, H.R. 893, the Ex-Offender Voter Registration Act of 2019, would require the Bureau of Prisons to provide voting information to people in federal prisons upon their release.

A national coalition of suffrage organizers is pushing these types of federal and state-level legislation as a part of their Right2Vote campaign. The campaign's national coordinator, Amani Sawari, told Truthout the campaign was originally initiated



by Jailhouse Lawyers Speak, an organization of incarcerated activists fighting the carceral system, in the aftermath of the August 21 National Prison Strike in 2018. "I'm hesitant to vote for or support any candidate who is not in favor of expanding our democracy," Sawari said of the Democratic candidates who have taken stances on the issue. "This is the new suffrage movement. We are trying to make sure that everyone has a voice in our democracy, and we need the voices of those who are incarcerated.... We need to make sure that we change these [prison] environments by incorporating their voice into the solutions."

Sawari is campaigning in her own state, Washington, for two bills that would provide voter information after release and restore voting rights to people with felony convictions who are in community custody, the state's version of parole. The latter bill died in the state legislature, but Sawari hopes the bill will be reintroduced next session. Sawari attended a hearing on New Mexico's enfranchisement bill, and watched it pass committee. While the legislation, HB 57, died in the Senate, the Right2Vote coalition is still actively pursuing legislation or grassroots campaigns in 10 other states, aiming to restore voting rights to some or all people convicted of felonies, or to end lifetime bans.

Selinda Guerrero, a community organizer with Millions for Prisoners New Mexico, tells Truthout she likewise began work on HB 57 after incarcerated people in her state listed enfranchisement as one of their demands during the 2018 national prison strike. She joined the Right2Vote coalition soon after. "We felt like it was time to bring [the bill forward],"

Guerrero says. "We knew it was ambitious.... Unfortunately, there were some moderate Democrats who just couldn't get aligned with it." Despite having a strong advocate in the bill's sponsor, State Rep. Gail Chasey, another strong advocate of voting rights for those released from prison, State Sen. Bill O'Neill, only signed on as a sponsor after the prison-voting clause was removed. Still, Guerrero says, the inclusion of prison-based voting in the original version of the bill was itself a meaningful step.

"We never even imagined we'd get as far as we did," Guerrero said. "We helped to change the narrative of the way people are looking at this issue, and we've kept it in the forefront. I'm really proud of that." In California, the suffrage group Initiate Justice is trying to persuade the state's Democrat-controlled legislature to put a measure on the 2020 ballot that would restore voting rights only to those on parole, not those who are currently incarcerated. Last year, the group tried to gather signatures for a ballot measure that would have allowed those in prison to vote, but weren't able to raise enough money to fund the effort.

The group's founder, Taina Vargas-Edmond, isn't even sure if the new version (which excludes incarcerated people) will make it through the California Legislature, but hopes it will have a better chance than last year's attempt, even though she believes the currently incarcerated should also have their voting rights restored.

Vargas-Edmond started Initiate Justice in 2016 alongside her husband, who was incarcerated at the time, because, she says, she wanted people who have been impacted by mass incarceration to have the tools and resources necessary to engage in the political process. "In general, folks haven't really questioned why we remove a citizen's right to vote just because they are incarcerated," Vargas-Edmond told Truthout. "In a lot of people's minds, losing this right isn't something that is really considered too extreme."

Still, she is hopeful that the legislature will be more open to a ballot measure as the debate over enfranchisement continues to gain traction on the national stage. However, she cautions against some of the Democratic candidates' calls to deny voting rights to people convicted of violent crimes. "It doesn't surprise me that there has been a more lukewarm position on felony disenfranchisement."

This is an idea that is still pretty popular, and as the country begins to move forward, it's happening very precipitously," Vargas-Edmond says. "I think it's important that we don't exclude people who are currently incarcerated, that we don't exclude people regardless of what their conviction is." Meanwhile, suffrage organizers with Emancipation Initiative and the Harvard Prison Divestment Campaign in Massachusetts are also pursuing a ballot initiative for 2022 that would restore voting rights to currently incarcerated people with felony convictions — the only population impacted by the carceral system who remain disenfranchised in the state.

A bill authored by State Sen. Adam Hinds also sought to amend a section of the state Constitution to restore voting rights to incarcerated people, but the proposal did not advance. People incarcerated for felonies lost their right to vote in Massachusetts in 2000 after voters approved a constitutional amendment prohibiting them from casting ballots while incarcerated.

Rachel Corey, an organizer with Emancipation Initiative, told Truthout the group plans to start collecting the more than 80,000 signatures needed for a citizen-initiated constitutional amendment this fall. "These aren't easy conversations," Corey said. "They're not easy elevator pitches.... But we know that people aren't the worst thing that they've done or been convicted of, and that those closest to the problem [within the criminal legal system] are closest, also, to the solution." Millions for Prisoners New Mexico's Guerrero agrees. "This is not a criminal justice issue; this is a democracy issue," she says. —

# Dozens Of Civil Rights Groups Ask Presidential Candidates To Support Letting People In Prison Vote

Sam Levine April 30, 2019 | [www.huffpost.com](http://www.huffpost.com)



Bernie Sanders is the only 2020 candidate so far to say unequivocally that incarcerated people should be able to vote.

*More than 70 civil rights and advocacy groups are urging candidates seeking the presidency to allow people to vote while they are incarcerated, signing an open letter on Tuesday to push an issue already dividing the Democratic field. Only Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) has said people incarcerated should be able to vote. He is the only 2020 presidential candidate so far to take that stance. Democratic Sens. Elizabeth Warren (Mass.) and Kamala Harris (Calif.) both have indicated they're open to the idea, but want to focus on restoring voting rights to people after they're released from prison. Former Rep. Beto O'Rourke and Housing and Urban Development Secretary Julian Castro said last week they are open to allowing nonviolent felons to vote in prison. Almost all of the other candidates seeking the Democratic nomination say they support restoring voting rights once someone either is released from prison or completes his or her criminal sentence.*

*Seventy-three groups, including the American Civil Liberties Union, the Southern Poverty Law Center and Greenpeace signed the letter. The longstanding practice of banning people convicted of felonies from voting in the United States is "as senseless as it is cruel," the groups wrote. They say the practice is tinged with racism and that many felon disenfranchisement laws were drafted in the Jim Crow south as a way to keep African American men from voting after they gained the right to vote.*

*"Felony disenfranchisement is not just anti-democratic and bad for public safety, it is an unpopular practice that sprang from the most shameful era of American history, a vestige of our past wildly out of step with international norms. And now is the moment for its abandonment," the letter says. "This growing movement against felony disenfranchisement is a promising endorsement of American values, but it raises a key question: Why disenfranchise people in prison to begin with? Why not let them continue to vote while they are incarcerated?" President Donald Trump and Vice President Mike Pence have already seized on candidates' willingness to let people with felonies vote in prison. Both pointed to recent Sanders comments saying even the Boston Marathon bomber should be able to vote in prison.*

*"Let the Boston bomber vote — he should be voting, right?" Trump said last week during a speech at the annual National Rifle Association convention. "I don't think so. Let terrorists that are in prison vote, I don't think so. Can you believe it? But this is where some of these people are coming from." "The same people who want to restrict the right to keep and bear arms of law-abiding citizens believe the Boston Marathon bomber should be given the right to vote on death row. I get news for you Bernie, not on our watch," Pence said in a speech at the convention. "Violent, convicted felons, murderers and terrorists should never be given the right to vote in prison. Not now, not ever."*

Although Trump and Pence have suggested that ending felon disenfranchisement is a fringe idea, two states in the country — Maine and Vermont — already allow incarcerated people to vote. A number of other countries allow at least some people to vote while they are imprisoned. Very few countries are like the United States and disenfranchise people after they are released from prison. Three states — Iowa, Kentucky and Virginia — permanently bar people with felony convictions from voting. The other 45 allow people to vote at some point after they leave prison, though the policies vary widely by state and can be extremely confusing to figure out. The Sentencing Project estimated in 2016 there were 1.3 million people in prison disenfranchised because of a felony conviction.

The president's power to enfranchise people in prison is limited because the 14th Amendment gives states the power to disenfranchise citizens. But activists say that just having the issue discussed at the national level elevates the conversation around the topic and forces politicians to publicly defend their position. "I believe prisoners are the most oppressed and most marginalized group that we have in the United States," Amani Sawari, the national coordinator of the Right2Vote Campaign, one of the groups that signed the letter, said in an interview. "So when we raise the bar and we say, 'Hey we want their voice to be heard,' we want them to have the right to vote, we want them to be valued and humanized in our society, we also raise the bar for all the people on probation and parole."

While activists say felon disenfranchisement has been overlooked for decades, there has been recent movement on the issue. Florida overwhelmingly voted in November to repeal the state's lifetime ban on voting for people with felony convictions, a change that could impact up to 1.4 million people. Around two dozen states have changed their policies around felon disenfranchisement since 1997, according to an October 2018 estimate from The Sentencing Project.

Read the entire open letter to presidential candidates here.—

## Open Letter to Presidential Candidates on Voting Rights

Dear Presidential Candidates:

When Brianna Ross was 19, she was convicted of a felony for stealing diapers for her son. At her sentencing hearing, a judge told Ross that she'd face a lifelong punishment for her mistake: She would never be allowed to vote. Ross said she was made to feel "empty and unimportant" for decades, as she was forced to sit on the sidelines of democracy. But her fortune finally changed in 2016, when Virginia Gov. Terry McAuliffe restored voting rights to Ross and more than 150,000 formerly incarcerated Virginians. A year later, at age 53, Ross participated in her first election, where she says she finally had the opportunity to say, "I count."

The right to vote is a fundamental component of American citizenship. Yet millions of Americans have been stripped of this right and made to feel like second-class citizens because of laws that exclude people from voting due to a criminal conviction. An estimated 6.1 million American citizens with felony convictions were barred from voting in the 2016 presidential election alone, a race that was decided by just 79,316 votes. In short, felony disenfranchisement is not just anti-democratic and bad for public safety, it is an unpopular practice that sprang from the most shameful era of American history, a vestige of our past wildly out of step with international norms. And now is the moment for its abandonment.

Felony disenfranchisement is as senseless as it is cruel. It subverts a person's fundamental right to participate as a full-fledged member of society. We know that returning citizens are far less likely to be re-arrested when we support them in their transitions back home. A large body of research shows that letting formerly incarcerated people vote fosters skills and capacities which are rehabilitative, and is significantly correlated with reducing re-arrest, incarceration, and self-reported criminality. Ensuring that all Americans can vote is not just a vital affirmation of our national character, but an important policy to enhance public safety and reduce recidivism.

Americans are finally starting to push back against this injustice. Most Americans now think it's common sense that people with prior felony convictions should be allowed to vote after they've completed their sentences. Last year, a supermajority of Florida voters endorsed a state constitutional amendment to end permanent disenfranchisement for people who have completed their sentences. Other states already allow formerly incarcerated people to regain their right to vote, but they vary in how they restore those rights, and seven more states have introduced bills in 2019 that would abolish felony disenfranchisement.

This growing movement against felony disenfranchisement is a promising endorsement of American values, but it raises a key question: Why disenfranchise people in prison to begin with? Why not let them continue to vote while they are incarcerated?

Throughout Europe, people in prison retain their right to vote while incarcerated. Unlike most American states, these 28 countries have enacted various measures to ensure that incarcerated people remain fully engaged in society. People who are incarcerated in Germany, for example, not only vote, but earn wages on par with the rest of the workforce. They have the right to be incarcerated near their families, and, upon release, have access to a "network of rights meant to promote their integration with and membership in German society." In Europe, mandatory and permanent disenfranchisement is as unusual as it is anti-democratic.

America, too, can honor every citizen's right to vote and still flourish. Maine, Vermont, and Puerto Rico treat the right to vote as a bedrock democratic principle for all citizens, including those in prison. Advocates, people in prison, and even corrections officials say voting allows incarcerated people to maintain a sense of connection to the community and society at large, which in turn helps prepare them for life after prison. Protecting every American's right to vote isn't only popular, it's also endorsed by those with the most intimate knowledge of our criminal legal system.

This practice was born in our Jim Crow past, and its modern persistence echoes historical pain. Felony disenfranchisement laws gained popularity in the post-Reconstruction era: shortly after black men gained the right to vote, disenfranchisement laws were codified to systematically strip away black votes. States where African Americans made up a greater portion of the prison population were significantly more likely to adopt felony disenfranchisement. As these laws spread, states began creating lists of crimes they believed were most likely to impact black voters. Felony disenfranchisement became a tool to limit the political power of black communities and individuals to elect representatives to advocate for their interests.

Even today, communities of color are disenfranchised at much higher rates than white voters. In the 2016 election, 7.4 percent of all African American adults were disenfranchised as a result of a felony conviction, a rate four times higher than the rest of the population. In Kentucky, a full quarter of the black electorate cannot vote today due to felony disenfranchisement. Latinx communities are also disenfranchised at rates greater than the general population. These racial disparities turn whole communities into second-class citizens, undermining faith in the fairness of our government, our elected officials, and the notion that all people are treated equally under the law.

We need a President who will stand up for the right of all Americans to vote. We thus ask each of you to publicly commit to ending felony disenfranchisement and to call for the restoration of voting rights for all citizens, regardless of their criminal history.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss this further, please contact Amani Sawari, National Right 2 Vote Campaign, at [amanisawari@gmail.com](mailto:amanisawari@gmail.com).

Sincerely,

ABO Comix  
Prison Policy Initiative  
Students for Prison Education and Reform  
Right2Vote Campaign  
YOGA FOR PEACE, JUSTICE, HARMONY  
WITH THE PLANET!  
Harvard Law School National Lawyers Guild  
Anti-Eviction Mapping Project  
Chicago Animal Save  
Worth Rises  
Worth Rises  
Demos  
Indivisible Midlands (SC2)  
American Homeless Society  
Real Justice PAC  
Color Of Change  
North Carolina Green Party  
National Lawyers Guild  
Anthony Rella PLLC  
WNY Peace Center  
Charles Hamilton Houston Institute for Race and Justice  
Disability Advocates for Rights and Transition  
LinkUp  
San Francisco Bay View National Black Newspaper  
Citizen Action of New York  
Emancipation Initiative  
Abolitionist Law Center  
The Queer Palestinian Empowerment network  
For the People - Saint Louis retired Marine  
New Jersey Institute for Social Justice  
Harvard Prison Divestment Campaign  
Helping Educate to Advance the Rights of Deaf Communities - HEARD  
Food Empowerment Project  
Rid Racism Milwaukee  
Franciscan Action Network  
GAPIMNY—Empowering Queer & Trans  
Asian Pacific Islanders  
Green Party of Allegheny County  
Greenpeace USA  
LatinoJustice PRLDEF  
Chicago Votes Action Fund  
Project NIA  
JustLeadershipUSA  
Popular Resistance  
Common Cause  
Let's Get Free: The Women and Trans Prisoner Defense Committee  
Brooklyn Defender Services

Illinois Coalition Against Torture  
The Justice Collaborative  
Drug Policy Alliance  
Fierce Allies  
Millions For Prisoners New Mexico  
Southern Poverty Law Center  
Nu View Consulting  
Valley Justice Coalition  
North NJ Democratic Socialists of America  
UMass Prison Abolition Collective  
Pitt Prison Outreach  
The Joseph Spencer Pratt Justice Reform Advocacy Group  
American Civil Liberties Union  
Students Against Mass Incarceration  
Showing Up for Racial Justice  
Seattle Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee  
Data For Progress  
Seattle IWOC  
Chicago Community Bond Fund  
he North Star  
National LGBTQ Task Force Action Fund  
DACC (Direct Action Coordinating Committee) at Amherst College  
Northwest Detroit Organization For Social Justice  
Northwest Detroiters for social justice  
Southern Center for Human Rights  
DSA MKE  
Quixote Center  
Princeton Students for Prison Education and Reform  
Center on Race, Inequality, and the Law at NYU School of Law  
WESPAC Foundation, Inc  
Racial Justice Action Center  
Unitarian Universalist Justice Ohio  
Let Fish Live  
Alan Augustson (Green Party) for President 2020  
The Andrew Goodman Foundation  
Data for Black Lives  
Initiate Justice  
5C Prison Abolition Collective  
CatholicNetwork.US  
Hawkins 2020 Exploratory Committee  
Free the Vote Coalition  
Vote Allies  
Prison Reform Movement  
Party for Socialism and Liberation  
Forum For Understanding Prisons (FFUP)

Updated List May, 2019

# KONCENTRATION KAMP KHRONICLES

ANALYSIS | NARRATIVE | POETRY

## MAY DAY: The Day of Unifying Our Actions

by Imam Siddique Abdullah Hasan | Ohio State Penitentiary



Revolutionary Greetings! It is an honor and privilege for me to be allowed to share my thoughts and insights with you before. I get to the main point of my observation, I want to make it abundantly clear to you - all of you present here today - are the real heroes of the world. I mean, you are the moral and spiritual compass. You are the progressive, freedom-loving people of our world, that remind nations of their Democratic obligations espoused in their respective National constitutions and in the United Nations charter that protects human rights from government excesses. You sacrifice the comforts and inconveniences of your home to be here. Your revolutionary spirit and iron Will determination make you strong enough to ignore the discouragement of unsupportive family and friends who pleaded for you not to get involved that is, not to cause trouble. For these reasons, I tip my hat and surrender to you the revolutionary command and salute: Shields up!

Does anyone in this audience know what day it is? Again, does anyone in this audience know what day it is? It's Tuesday May 1st, and that makes it May day. May day is an international working-class holiday that originated in this country on May 1st 1886. Thus, today is the 126th anniversary of a real general strike for the eight-hour workday we now have in place. Today is the 126th anniversary of when tens of thousands of industrial workers - skilled and unskilled, men and women, black and white, native and immigrant - across this country prepared to come together to protest the long work week. So today is a monumental day, a historical day, for several reasons.

We are gathered here to commemorate the anniversary of various movements and struggles whose origins coincide with this date or time of year, especially of union workers, occupy Wall Street, and the middle East uprisings. The momentum and velocity of this righteous energy has resonated within every layer in society inspiring many others to discard the mental shackles of powerlessness and replacing it with a sense of hope and defiance. For this reason the prison Liberation movement has joined the ranks of the global resistance movements just mentioned, with ours in recent time being initiated by the December 9th 2010, Georgia prison work stoppage for living wages and then the January 3rd 2011, successful hunger strike here at Ohio State penitentiary, which was enthusiastically endorsed and followed up on July 1st of the same year by the California hunger strikers. Our display of solidarity with our California brothers shows that there exists genuine unity and affection inside the US prison system. And in the last couple of months, the savage and chicken-hearted murder of 17 year old Trayvon Martin sent tens and thousands of people to the streets demanding accountability for his killing. These protesters - through crowding the streets for justice in Trayvon's murder are all part of the 99 percenters, and their mobilization will eventually increase the participation and movements that have broader goals and ramifications. Not since the 1960s anti-war and civil Rights Movement have such a large, disparate percentage of Americans have amassed to voice their demands for justice and equality that's why I tell you we are experiencing a momentous time.

Though we have separate groups, we have the same agenda to promote equality and terminate oppression. What's so special about this is that we are more

for their amateurish counter-protest games, we continue to believe in the truth and righteousness of our cause despite enormous pressure from the government and corporate America. That's we stand here today United. United against the emotionally and philosophically mature than our sixties predecessors which will enable us to be able to understand how important it is for us to unite instead of wasting valuable time and human capital pointing out the flaws and shortcomings of the other groups have. Because of our disciplined unity, the enemies of progress have doubled their machinations in order to slow down or kill our momentum. They have tried to assassinate our message and the values we are exposing. They have said things like, "The Occupy Wall Street movement is leaderless". They recklessly characterize the savages, rapists hobos, uncaring, and unsympathetic monsters and a host of other names. However, most of us are too sophisticated in our thinking to fall United against the powers-that-be United we stand...but if we ever allow our enemies to divide us again, we will take a hard fall.

The prison Liberation movement is naturally tied to the various protest movements in society. We are natural allies, our enemies and yours are one in the same. The same government and corporate America that are oppressing you, are the same government and corporate America that are oppressing us behind enemy lines. It should never be about you against us or us against you it should always be about us against them for prisoners feel the physical extremes of brutality and brunt of oppression and exploitation that some of you present can only partially imagine. People in society get sprayed with tear gas that burn the eyes, but prisoners are treated more brutally. For example, prison guards smash our faces into walls and break our bones with all kinds of takedown maneuvers they gnash our noses and swell our faces with bare knuckles of course while our hands are cuffed behind our backs and our feet are in shackles. Still worse, they occasionally murder prisoners without any fear of judicial prosecution. We are condemned to solitary confinement for doing things much less as threatening as you are doing today, and we are kept beyond our earliest release dates. However, many of us I'm not giving up championing the causes of truth, freedom, justice and equality, and for this reason we sympathize with everybody here at this gathering. And though we are locked up, our fighting spirit and souls are there with you. And that's real talk!

We are all excited today, but we must moderate our jubilation because of what lies ahead. We have two major challenges ahead of us - staying unified and not getting discouraged by unexpected encounters. Because our movement is constantly evolving and growing, naturally our ranks will swell and further diversify. But, sometimes with diversity comes dissension. However, dissension is not always a byproduct of diversity.

The longevity and durability of our unity will depend upon how we conduct ourselves, and upon how we manage differences of opposing opinions. We must not forget the dissenting perspectives are an element of a progressive Democratic movement. It is not something we should feel ashamed of. Managing dissenting views requires us to be flexible in our thinking, to be humble, and to be open for learning new things. Our humility will make it comfortable for us to accept agreed-upon stances that may not be exactly our preferred choice. Another challenge is, we must show the would-be protesters and our oppressors that we are not a passing fad, that we are not weekend warriors, that we are not bored adventures. Instead we are the real deal - we are revolutionaries.

They must know we are here to stay. We are here for the long haul or at least until our demands are met.

Our struggle is not a one-night thing it is not something that will be accomplished in a month or two and perhaps not even in a few years. It is a struggle that I must stay vibrant for an entire generation or until need be. Many struggles in history took years and even decades, so we are no different. Our objective requires us to fight and maintain our fervor and tenacity for however long. We can't get exhausted, we must not become dismay. We must stay vigilant. We can't lose heart when we can't measure our success with some type of yardstick, or when we don't see change right away.

Have I given up? No. In fact Hell No! Never! Giving up is not an option. It's not in my DNA. My stance has been firm and consistent, even though the prospect of death has been hovering over my head for the last two decades. Come what may, and let the wind blow wherever, for I refuse to capitulate. Our reward, you see, lies not so much in achieving our goal though that is what we strive hard for - but our reward is



already given to us. Our reward comes with the feeling of pride and human dignity that is stirring our souls right now- that is the true reward. It is knowing that we are not among the naysayers- the people who never leave their couches to join movements for a change; the people who don't think they have a chance- those who Frantz Fanon aptly described as, "beaten from the start." They are the know-it-alls, the people who claim to have all the answers, yet they sit on the safe side lines. Let's thank our Creator, and the positive forces in the universe, for not making us part of that group.

Peace and may God bless all of you.

From death row, this is Imam Siddique Abdullah Hasan. —

#### Editor's Note

Imam Hasan is looking for political support from concerned persons- professors, students, journalists, radio and news personalities, religious and community leaders,

activists, etc. - who are ready, willing and able to help him build a movement to expose the gross miscarriage of justice in his case. To learn more about Hasan's case, log into [www.lucasvilleamnesty.org](http://www.lucasvilleamnesty.org)

This address was delivered May 1st 2012, to the Denver general strike assembly in Civic Center Park. The event was organized and supported by the Denver chapter of the Industrial Workers of the World, Occupy Denver and other groups. An audience of approximately 150 people from all walks of life- students, people experiencing homelessness, radicals, progressives, artists, activists and people just passing by- quietly gathered to hear Imam Hasan address them. By the end of the speech, several remarked that his comments were the best part of the May Day event.

#### Mailing Info

Imam Siddique Abdullah Hasan, R130-559  
Ohio State Penitentiary  
PO Box 1436  
Youngstown, OH 44501



## Call for Content

In addition to publishing content raising awareness about the Right2Vote Campaign and its initiatives, the Right2Vote Report accepts work from prisoners in the form of articles, art and poetry as well as the contribution of stamps. We also work with other nonprofits and organizers to amplify your voices. This publication and its campaign are about you and our most meaningful contributions come from the inside. For readers interested in submitting their work: typed and printed can be sent to the return address or emailed to: [amanisawari@gmail.com](mailto:amanisawari@gmail.com). Please write your return address onto your submission

#### Prison Mental Health/Self Care Awareness Art Gallery

This health awareness month we want to draw attention to health concerns in our nation's prisons. Radical health, an New York based organization founded by Roddenberry Fellow Ivelyse Andino, emphasizes the fact that, "everyone deserves access to quality care and health innovation" and that includes people who are in prison. Healthcare is more than prevention of sickness, it includes physical, mental and emotional well being. Many people fail to understand how violent and unhealthy prisons are because we don't have a full understanding of what health concerns exist inside beyond medical care. We are looking for artwork that helps to tell the story behind the experience of maintaining ones emotional and mental health while in prison for an art gallery in its early stages of planning.



During the Flood by Donald "C-Note" Hooker, K94063 (B5-136) P.O. Box 4490

#### Collaboration with VOCAL-NY

Organizers at VOCAL-NY -- a grassroots membership-based organization that organizes with low-income people across New York State -- is looking for incarcerated supporters in New York to contribute to our multi-year campaign from the inside. This new suffrage movement requires your leadership and we need your voice in the movement to restore your right to vote. Anyone interested in connecting with VOCAL-NY can do so by responding to the following address: Nick Encalada-Malinowski, VOCAL-NY, 80a Fourth Avenue, Brooklyn, NY, 11217

#### Discriminology Grade School Experiences

What was school like for you in elementary, middle and/or high school? Did you feel like you belonged? Did you trust your teachers? Did you feel like your teacher(s) believed in you? Did you feel like your culture was accepted at school or in your classroom? Did you have someone you looked up to at school? Did you learn about successful people that looked like you or that were from your community? Discriminology, a non-profit focused on helping families create more fair and just

schools using technology, is requesting personal stories/narratives about the educational experiences, or lack thereof, that contributed to your development. Discriminology was founded by DeMar Pitman, also a 2019 Roddenberry Fellow, after standing up for two African-American 4th grade girls who were discriminated against by their teacher. Your story is being collected to determine what things schools can do differently to ensure all students are successful, no matter their race, income, religion, and/or gender.

#### Break Every Chain Poetry

Poetic interpretation of the phrase, "Break Every Chain". *Break Every Chain* is a non-fiction book authored by Aaron Greene, law student and president of the Black Law Student Association. *Break Every Chain* draws the connections between the Slave Era, Convict Leasing Era and the current era of Mass Incarceration. Poetic interpretations are being collected to be published in his book to be released in September.

#### Embrace Race Blog & Podcast

Narratives describing the challenges you face parenting, raising a family or maintaining relationships while incarcerated for Embrace Race, a national nonprofit that supports parents, teachers, and other adults to raise children who are thoughtful, informed and brave about race; founded by Andrew Grant-Thomas also a 2019 Roddenberry Fellow. Narrative descriptions are being collected to potentially post on Embrace Race's Blog Embrace Race's blog, along with their facebook page, has hundreds of subscribers who are interested in learning about the obstacles that families encounter who are impacted by incarceration. Andrew Grant will also be hosting a podcast featuring Amani Sawari in August where excerpts from submissions will be read to Embrace Race's listening audience. [www.embracerace.org](http://www.embracerace.org) & Facebook page @weembracerace



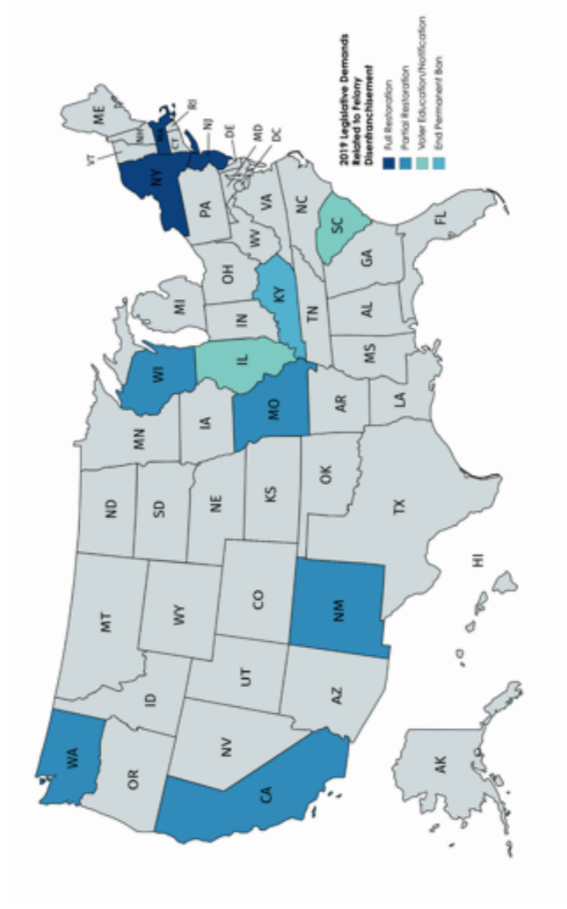
#### V.O.I.C.Ed Podcast

Beginning this month Amani Sawari will be launching a new podcast V.O.I.C.Ed, Voices Of Incarcerated Citizens Empowered, in order to uplift the voices of those on the inside and having conversations as it relates to criminal justice reform, prison abolition, the prison-industrial-slave-complex, new legislation and current events. If you are interested in being featured as a voice on this podcast please send a letter to the return address with topics that you would like to discuss as well as the process for registering a phone number on your contact list. Those who are interested in being featured will be sent the call line once they're approved as a guest. All conversations made on the VOICED call line are recorded to be edited for the podcast. Please do not abuse the call line.

Sawarimi does not provide legal services. Sawarimi is a platform of expression and empowerment for disenfranchised and marginalized groups, especially members of the African diaspora. Amani Sawari is a writer, founder of SawariMi and SawariMedia, spokesperson for Jailhouse Lawyers Speak and National Coordinator of their Right2Vote Campaign with the support of the Roddenberry Foundation. Download and print issues of the Right2Vote Report for distribution at <http://sawarimi.org>

Sawari Mi  
14419 Greenwood Ave N.  
Ste. A #132  
Seattle, WA 98133

### National Progress to Ending Felony Disenfranchisement



By Selinda Guerrero and artist Micah Bazant